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ABSTRACT

A conversational skills training program for persons who admitted discomfort in most interpersonal situations and who found it difficult to initiate and maintain conversation was designed to teach these conversational behaviors: asking questions, expressing disagreement and agreement, paraphrasing, initiating conversations, giving compliments, and asking for behavior change. Instruction in each conversational behavior was conducted according to a curricular sequence that involved self-monitoring, observation of models, covert rehearsal, behavior rehearsal, and practice of target behaviors. Although the subjects were evaluated consistently throughout the program, a need for more systematic program evaluation was indicated. (References and classroom materials are appended.) (MAI)

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The Development and Evaluation of a Course in Reticence Management

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Since 1965 considerable research in the field of Speech Communication has focused on cross situational fear and anxiety about oral communication. Although the constructs are not necessarily interchangeable, research has been conducted under a variety of labels: reticence (Phillips and Metzger, 1973; Phillips, 1977) communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977), shyness (Zimbardo, 1977), social isolation (Biglan, Glaser, and Dow, 1978). It has been noted that in our society people are able to live without competency in a great many areas, but in order to receive rewards or even to survive, communication skills are critical (Phillips, 1977). Thus, it is not surprising that in a recent nationwide survey of adults, anxiety about oral communication was reported as the number one fear (Bruskin Associates, 1973). Apprehension about oral communication has, in fact, been correlated with academic achievement, occupational choice, hiring and advancement, job satisfaction, and peer recognition. It should be noted that in the studies describing these correlations, causality is inferred rather than demonstrated directly. Direct inferences of causation are not possible since the studies have not involved specific experimental manipulation.

Reticence and Employment

There is some self-report questionnaire evidence to suggest that socially withdrawn people prefer occupations requiring a low frequency of interaction, and that this pattern holds even when occupations requiring more communication, also offer more status and economic reward (Daly and McCroskey, 1975). In an attempt to validate this finding, Scott, McCroskey, and Sheahan (1978) found that this reported preference was actually present in a large sample of government employees. In the same study, it was found that people with high communication apprehension were

less likely to seek advancement when that move would increase their communication requirements. In addition, in a series of simulated job applicant screening studies it was found that highly apprehensive communicators were less likely to receive an interview (Daly and Leth, 1976) and, if interviewed, would be less likely to receive a job (Daly and Leth, 1976; Richmond, 1977). Falcione, McCroskey, and Daly (1977) found that high communication apprehension was negatively associated with job satisfaction, particularly as it was associated with the person's supervisor. As a corollary to this, in a study of a natural group of government employees, it was found that employees with low communication apprehension had worked for the organization over 50 percent longer than people with high communication apprehension (a mean of 11.3 years versus 7.5 years) (Scott, McCroskey, and Sheahan, 1978).

Reticence and Academic Achievement

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between reticence and academic achievement (c.f. Cowen, Zax, Izzo, and Trost, 1966; Yellott, Liem, and Cowen, 1969; McCroskey, 1977; McCroskey and Andersen, 1976). Students with high communication apprehension were found to have lower college grade point averages (McCroskey and Andersen, 1976), lower scores on standardized college entrance examinations (Bashore, 1971; McCroskey and Andersen, 1976), lower grades in small classes in junior high school (Hurt, Preiss and Davis, 1976), and in college (Scott and Wheeless, 1976). It should be emphasized that these correlations have all been found even though no meaningful relationship has been found between communication apprehension and intelligence (Bashore, 1971; Davis, 1977; McCroskey, Daly, and Sorensen, 1976). Results from data collected from nearly 20,000 college students at Michigan State University, Illinois State University, and West Virginia University over an eight year period suggest that between 15 and 20 percent

of students at these schools suffer from communication apprehension which interferes with their functioning in everyday human encounters. Surveys at other colleges and universities suggest that these figures are typical (McCroskey, 1977). Since these are all correlational studies, we cannot be certain that communication apprehension causes poor grades and low scores on standardized tests. However, it certainly appears possible that communication apprehension contributes to poor classroom performance since highly apprehensive individuals might be less likely to participate in class discussions, ask questions, approach teachers, and talk with other students.

Despite the substantial amount of literature in the area of communication apprehension, our knowledge of treatment procedures is severely limited (McCroskey, 1977). This is because much of the research has focused on causes, consequences, correlates and measurement of oral communication apprehension. That so little research has been devoted to treatment is surprising given the severe consequences of reticence (Phillips, 1968; McCroskey, 1977; Glaser, 1978). A social behavioral approach to treatment was initially presented to the field by Phillips (Phillips, 1968, 1977; Phillips and Metzger, 1973). While Phillips' program at Penn State University appears to be effective, assessment procedures have lacked the necessary control to produce conclusive results. The only pre-post assessment measures utilize interviews between students and instructor, but since no systematic coding procedures were developed the reliability and validity of this operation are unknown. In addition, no control group has been used as a basis for comparison.

This paper describes a conversational skills training program which was developed during the past two years at the University of Oregon for individuals reporting social anxiety. The course was designed for people

who reported being uncomfortable in most interpersonal situations and who found it difficult to initiate and maintain conversation. It was designed to teach them how to develop comfortable and effective social behavior in a variety of interpersonal contexts. Although considerable research has been done on interpersonal behavior, the value of conversational skills training has seldom been studied systematically. A number of social skills programs have included such positive interpersonal behaviors as giving compliments (e.g., Curran and Gilbert, 1975; Eisler, Miller, Hersen, and Alford, 1974; Rathus, 1973), but disproportionate attention has been given to teaching what Hersen and Bellack (1976) call "negative assertiveness" (e.g., Wolfe and Fodor, 1977; McFall and Marston, 1970; Kazdin, 1974; McFall and Lillesand, 1971; Nietzel, Martorano, and Melnick, 1977). The number of situations which call for the assertion of a right or demand may be very limited in comparison with those that simply call for initiating conversations and maintaining social relationships. Moreover, there is some evidence that negative assertive responses are associated with being less well-liked (Rich and Schroeder, 1976). The value of teaching socially anxious persons to be more positively reinforcing in interpersonal situations has not been systematically examined. Anxiety and avoidance in such situations may be due to the anxious person receiving aversive responses and a relatively low rate of positive reinforcement from others (Patterson and Reid, 1970). By increasing their reinforcement skills, the socially anxious person could increase the approach behavior of others (e.g., Kirby and Toler, 1970) and reduce the rate of aversive stimulation (Patterson and Cobb, 1971).

The training program used in the present study teaches people to comfortably perform each of seven conversational behaviors. The behaviors

are: asking questions, expressing agreement and disagreement, paraphrasing, initiating conversations, giving compliments, and asking for behavior change. In selecting these communication behaviors, the self-monitored social behavior of anxious subjects was compared with the behavior of a sample of nonanxious subjects (Biglan, Glaser, and Dow, 1978). The existence of differences in this comparison provided support for the relevance of skills included in our treatment program. Other behaviors (paraphrasing, initiating conversations, asking for behavior change) were added in the second revision of the program.

Instruction in each conversational behavior was conducted according to an eight step curricular sequence. The components of this sequence were chosen on the basis of research indicating their effectiveness. They include self-monitoring (Nelson, Lipinski, and Black, 1975), observation of models (Kazdin, 1974; Eisler, Hersen, and Miller, 1973), covert rehearsal (McFall and Twentyman, 1973; McFall and Lillesand, 1971; Twentyman and McFall, 1975), behavior rehearsal (Friedman, 1971), and in vivo practice of target behaviors (Crowe, Marks, Agras, and Leitenberg, 1972). The program begins with direct instruction of the target behavior. Then students are taught to write effective examples of the particular behavior being studied. Here a specific situation is described and the student writes a statement that would be an effective response in that situation. (See Appendix A) Students then learn to identify and keep daily records of those situations in which they could have utilized the target behavior in their own lives. For each situation identified, they write an effective statement they might have made. (See Appendix B) Students are then taught to observe others who use the particular communication behavior effectively. In this way, the modeling component of the program involves observation of

models in the person's natural environment. Students record specific example statements that they hear others make. By noting how other people use the skill effectively, students are finding models that they can borrow from. (See Appendix C) Students then choose specific situations to work on. Reading over their records and focusing on particular situations makes it more likely that they will become skilled in using the new behavior at the times and in the places that are most important to them. (See Appendix D) Next, students are taught to practice the new behavior covertly. This involves imagining specific scenes in which they utilize the new skill effectively. They practice very precisely what they say and how they say it, experimenting with what seems like the best approach. Covertly rehearsing the behavior in this way makes it much more likely that the students will be comfortable and effective in actually using the behavior in real situations. (See Appendix E) After they have had time to covertly rehearse the behavior, they have an opportunity to practice using the skill by role playing specific situations with other students. When this behavior rehearsal is completed students begin to increase the frequency of their new skill in actual life situations. (See Appendix F)

Assessment

In our assessments of subjects we examined a diverse set of responses through a variety of methods. The need for multiple sources of data in the study of social behavior is generally recognized (Arkowitz, 1977; Curran, 1977; Hersen and Bellack, 1976). Given the modest correlations among different assessments, a unitary construct of social anxiety does not appear to be appropriate (Lang, 1968). People's social behavior, their own evaluation of that behavior, their comfort in social situations, and the comfort

and evaluations of others may not be related; we must evaluate each of these classes of events. In addition, we cannot assume that different methods of measuring the same events will necessarily be correlated. For example, the rate of specific social behaviors in laboratory interactions may not be related to the rates of these behaviors in particular settings of the natural environment (Lick and Unger, 1977). In the present study, we assessed subjects' questionnaire descriptions of their social behavior. We examined the rates of the specific social behaviors we were interested in through both laboratory samples of social behavior and subjects' self-monitoring of those same behaviors. Subjects' comfort in both of these settings was also assessed. Finally, the impact of the individual's social behavior on others was assessed through peers whom the subject identified and through ratings of confederates and coders.

Questionnaires: All subjects completed the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (SAD) (Watson and Friend, 1969), Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) (Rathus, 1973), the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) (McCroskey, 1970), and the Interpersonal Events Schedule (IES) (Youngren, Zeiss, and Lewinsohn, 1975). Finally, subjects completed a questionnaire which described the behavioral assessment that they would be exposed to and asked them to predict how comfortable they would be in this situation.

Behavioral Samples: These assessments were modeled after those of Arkowitz et al., (1975). Each subject participated in the Extended Interaction Test (EIT) in which he or she was asked to talk with both male and female confederates for five minutes each. The order of these interactions was counterbalanced across subjects. Subjects were told that the persons they would interact with worked for the project and had simply been asked

to get acquainted with the subject. The subject was asked to try to get acquainted with each of these confederates in the way they usually would. They were asked not to discuss the experiment or the circumstances of the experiment, but were not restricted from talking about any other topics. Confederates were blind to group membership of subjects. Confederates were instructed to react in a friendly manner but to restrict their own statements to five seconds or less and not to initiate conversation unless the subject had been quiet for at least 10 seconds. These interactions were recorded on audio tape for later analysis, but were not observed.

After each interaction, both the subject and the confederate completed rating forms. Subjects were asked to rate comfort, to estimate the number of times they emitted each of the social skills targeted in the instructional program, and to estimate the number of times they let the conversation lapse. The confederates rated their comfort and enjoyment in the conversation, their interest in getting to know the subject if they had met them at a party, and the social skill of the subject.

Peer Rating: Data about the social skill, activity, and comfort of each subject was obtained from at least one friend or acquaintance. Subjects were asked to give the peer rating form to their two closest friends. The form was adapted from that of Arkowitz et al., (1975). It asked peers to indicate how long they had known the subject, how well they knew the subject, and how many friends they thought the subject had. Then the peer responded to 11 true-false items which described the comfort and social behavior of the individual. A measure of social anxiety was derived by totaling the items answered in the anxious direction. Finally, peers were asked to rate the overall social skill of the individual on a 100-point scale.

Self-Monitoring: In their review of the external validity of behavioral assessments of anxiety, Lick and Unger (1977) concluded that subjects' self-monitoring of target behaviors could provide an important check on the external validity of laboratory assessments. In the present study all subjects self-monitored their social behavior throughout their involvement in the study. Self-monitoring materials were filled out about half-way through the day and again at the end of the day. On each of these occasions, subjects indicated how many men and women they had talked to during that portion of the day, and how comfortable they were in each of these two types of conversations. In addition, they were asked to indicate how many times they had done each of the following: asked questions of another, paraphrased, expressed agreement or disagreement, initiated conversations, complimented someone or asked someone for behavior change.

Future Perspectives

The conversational skills program described in this paper was developed as a treatment for individuals reporting a high level of social anxiety and a low level of social skill. The Oregon program is clearly not the only approach to the treatment of this problem, there are other social behavioral programs as well as programs which emphasize cognitive restructuring or systematic desensitization. At this time we must remain uncertain about which aspects of which treatment programs are most effective for which people. Much systematic program evaluation is needed.

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Appendix A

SOME PRACTICE WRITING QUESTIONS

The first step in learning to be a more effective question asker is to THINK OF QUESTIONS. This involves writing down questions in situations where they are appropriate. In the next section we would like you to practice writing questions for some common situations. Here's an example of what we mean:

EXAMPLE: "I'm looking forward to starting school after being away from it all summer."

YOUR QUESTION: What are you looking forward to most?

Please read the statements of other listed below. Then keep the conversations going by writing a question.

1) OTHER: "I really enjoy my job of teaching 3rd graders. In fact, even though it takes a great deal of energy, I don't often think of it as 'work'."

YOUR QUESTION:

2) OTHER: "We went camping last weekend and it rained from the moment we got there until the moment we left."

YOUR QUESTION:

3) OTHER: "I don't think high school students are mature enough to be graded on a pass no-pass basis."

YOUR QUESTION:

4) OTHER: "I thought Star Wars was one of the best movies I've ever seen."

YOUR QUESTION:

5) OTHER: "My boss is really driving me crazy. I have such a hard time saying 'no' to her."

YOUR QUESTION:

6) OTHER: "San Francisco is one of my favorite cities."

YOUR QUESTION:

Appendix B

IDENTIFYING QUESTION SITUATIONS

Situations in Which I Could Have Asked a Question (just describe it enough so you can remember it)	Questions I Might Have Asked
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	
6)	
7)	

Appendix C

OBSERVING QUESTIONS OTHERS ASK

The third step in learning to ask questions effectively is to observe OTHERS ASKING QUESTIONS. This involves writing down questions that you hear other people ask, either to you or to others. We've supplied you with a sheet on which to write questions that you hear other people asking. It is simply titled "Questions Others Have Asked." You should try to find as many questions as you can. By noticing how others ask questions, you will find models that you can borrow from. This will make it easier to think of your own questions.

QUESTIONS OTHERS HAVE ASKED

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

9) _____

10) _____

Appendix D

CHOOSING QUESTION SITUATIONS TO WORK ON

The exercises you have been doing the last few days have helped you to identify situations in which you could ask questions. They should also have helped you become more aware of how others ask questions. The next step is to CHOOSE SITUATIONS IN WHICH YOU WANT TO ASK MORE QUESTIONS. To do this, read over the records you have kept the past few days, think about other situations that are likely to come up, and then write brief descriptions of each type of situation in which you want to increase your questions to others. On the space below we have provided a place for you to list the types of situations in which you want to be able to question others. These situations can be fairly general, such as "being with strangers" or they can be more specific, such as "listening to friends talk about classes." To give you a better idea of the types of situations you might list, here are some that others have listed:

Discussing sports with others
Meeting someone for the first time
Talking to a superior at work
Talking to my mother

By choosing situations you want to work on, you make it more likely that you will become skilled in asking questions at the times and in the places that are most important to you.

TYPES OF SITUATIONS TO WORK ON

1) _____

_____

2) _____

_____

3) _____

_____

4) _____

_____

5) _____

_____

6) _____

_____

Appendix E

COVERT REHEARSAL PRACTICE RECORD

DATE	TYPE OF SITUATION	SPECIFIC INSTANCE	QUESTION YOU IMAGINED	POSITIVE RESPONSE OF OTHER

Appendix F

SELF-MONITORING FORM

FIRST HALF OF DAY (Before 3:00 P.M.)

COMMUNICATE WITH MEN — Situations:	Social	Academic	Work
1--Frequency (how many men did you talk to?)			
2--Comfort rating on a 1-7 scale with 1=extremely uncomfortable 7=extremely comfortable 9=no information			
3--# of questions you asked			
4--# of paraphrases you gave			
5--# of agreements you stated			
6--# of disagreements you stated			
7--# of conversations you initiated			
8--# of compliments you gave			
9--# of behavior changes you asked for			

COMMUNICATION WITH WOMEN — Situations:	Social	Academic	Work
1--Frequency (how many women did you talk to?)			
2--Comfort rating on a 1-7 scale with 1=extremely uncomfortable 7=extremely comfortable 9=no information			
3--# of questions you asked			
4--# of paraphrases you gave			
5--# of agreements you stated			
6--# of disagreements you stated			
7--# of conversations you initiated			
8--# of compliments you gave			
9--# of behavior changes you asked for			

SECOND HALF OF DAY (After 3:00 P.M.)

COMMUNICATION WITH MEN — Situations:	Social	Academic	Work
1--Frequency (how many men did you talk to?)			
2--Comfort rating on a 1-7 scale with 1=extremely uncomfortable 7=extremely comfortable 9=no information			
3--# of questions you asked			
4--# of paraphrases you gave			
5--# of agreements you stated			
6--# of disagreements you stated			
7--# of conversations you initiated			
8--# of compliments you gave			
9--# of behavior changes you asked for			

COMMUNICATION WITH WOMEN — Situations:	Social	Academic	Work
1--Frequency (how many women did you talk to?)			
2--Comfort rating on a 1-7 scale with 1=extremely uncomfortable 7=extremely comfortable 9=no information			
3--# of questions you asked			
4--# of paraphrases you gave			
5--# of agreements you stated			
6--# of disagreements you stated			
7--# of conversations you initiated			
8--# of compliments you gave			
9--# of behavior changes you asked for			